



*MK Nature Center*

# STREAM

The Seasonal Newsletter of the Morrison Knudsen Nature Center

Winter 2021

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## Connect With Instagram!

Austin Reich, AmeriCorps Member, MKNC



My second AmeriCorps term has started much differently than my first. I haven't been knee deep in tykes, scrubbing Elmer's glue off of my hands, or even teaching 400 kids in only two days.

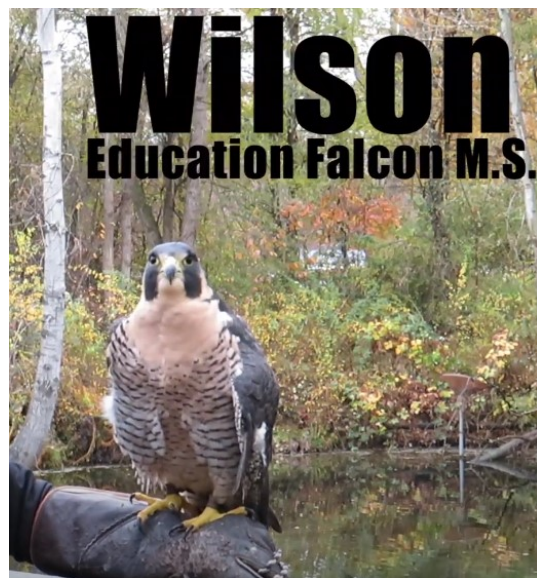
However, determined to have at least some sort of educational impact, I utilized my youthful savvy of the worldwide web and set out to make some educational videos.

After much trial and error, Sara and I were finally able to produce a weekly Instagram series called "Today at MK." In the spirit of social media, we tried to make quick one minute videos so as not to lose the attention span of our viewers.

Some of the topics we've covered include, the history of the Nature Center, Wilson the Peregrine falcon, Turkeys, and Behind the Scenes at the Nature Center, Feeding Birds, and Animals in Winter totaling 1,333 views (as of December 24th)!

Only about 40% of our footage actually makes it to the not so big screen, which means 60% of it is bloopers!

If you're curious to see what we've been getting up to with these fun videos, you can [view them here](#). Or, follow us on Instagram [mk\\_nature\\_center](#).



# Nature Notes

Vicky Runnoe, Conservation Education Supervisor, IDFG

As this strangest of years comes to a close, I find myself reflecting on the positives that the year has brought. Given the course of 2020, this may seem odd, but the nature center has remained a little beacon of light for so many.

The creativity and ingenuity of the staff has been amazing as they navigated some very different ways of doing things. I appreciate their good humor and hard work more than I can say. Our volunteers who came flocking back for physically distanced, masked opportunities brought a smile to my face each and every time I saw them. Their joy at being “back at the nature center” was palpable, their excitement energizing.

The work of these two groups was much appreciated by our visitors, grateful for the opportunity to be outside doing something that felt normal and ordinary. Watching an excited family with our scavenger hunt sheets in-hand, was to feel their excitement as they explored the nature center, their findings recorded with exclamations of wonder. Other visitors came on their own or in twos, stopping to peer at the sturgeon, enjoy the wildflowers, marvel at the changing leaves, or simply absorb the beauty they found around them. Their frequent comments of “we are so glad you are open” were heard time and again.

We were glad to be open as well! And grateful to be able to welcome our visitors and volunteers as we all worked to find the light during this odd and challenging time. Wishing all of you a safe and enjoyable holiday season!

## Online Programs Offered



MK Nature Center has started to deliver online programs to groups and the public.

From July, 2019 through mid-November, in-person programs were still offered and delivered with COVID-19 precautions in place. For now, in-person programming is paused, so we have shifted our educational efforts to online experiences. For more information about online program content and prices for your group or class, contact [sara.focht@idfg.idaho.gov](mailto:sara.focht@idfg.idaho.gov).

For information about online evening lectures, check out the events section [on our website](#).

Wildlife Educator, Sara Focht, holds up a piece of wolf scat to her laptop camera so the eager eyes of her class members can look up close as part of the Scat and Tracks online program.



# Images of Winter



Winter photos clockwise starting in upper left.

Black-capped Chickadee.  
Photo by Brian Lawless.

Heron Tracks in the snow.  
Photo by Vicky Runnoe.

Belted Kingfisher.  
Photo by Austin Reich.

Dark-eyed Junco.  
Photo by Austin Reich.

Fall turning into Winter.  
Photo by Austin Reich.

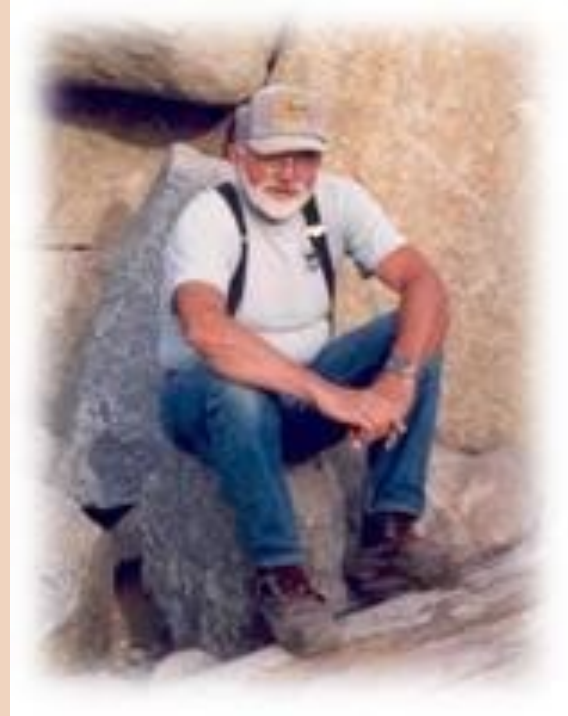
Eastern Fox Squirrel Tracks.  
Photo by Sara Focht





# In Remembrance

Sara Focht, Wildlife Educator, MK Nature Center

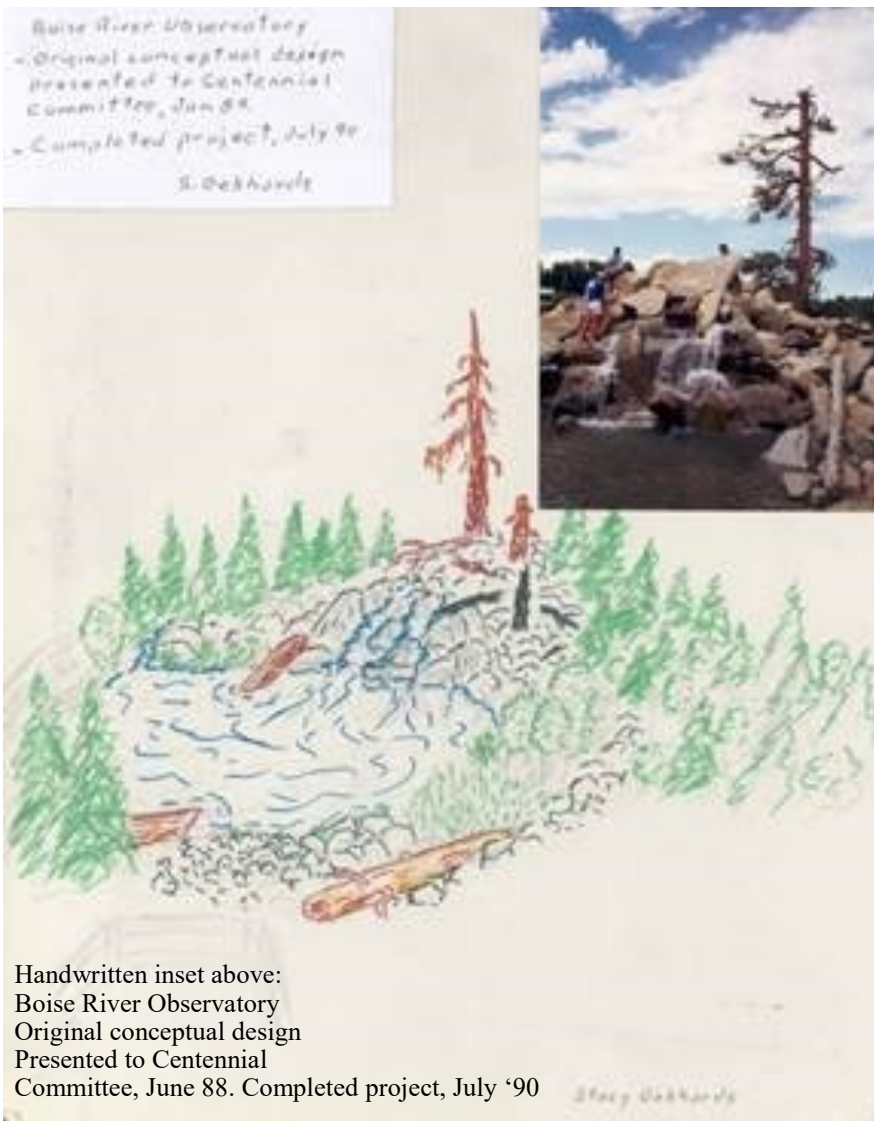


Those of us who work at the Nature Center see the result of Stacy Gebhards's work every day! Stacy was a founder and stream designer....a key visionary...of the MK Nature Center. Stacy worked for Idaho Department of Fish and Game for 38 years. He held many positions within the department in several areas in Idaho. He was the Bureau Chief of Fisheries and a Regional Supervisor.

In 1989, IDFG Director Jerry Conley wanted to use the vacant lot in back of IDFG headquarters to build a legacy project for Idaho's 100 year anniversary.

Gebhards suggested building a self-contained facility, the centerpiece of which would be a manmade stream that would allow people to "press noses" with all the life stages of trout and salmon in a mountain stream from incubating eggs and fry to free-swimming juveniles to adults and spawners. Visitors would witness this "life on the bottom" at any time of the year through a series of observation windows with guided or self-guided tours.

His amazing outdoor life, including his contribution to Idaho Department of Fish and Game and the Nature Center [can be read here.](#)



Handwritten inset above:  
Boise River Observatory  
Original conceptual design  
Presented to Centennial  
Committee, June 88. Completed project, July '90



# A Year of Change

Sara Focht, Wildlife Educator, MKNC



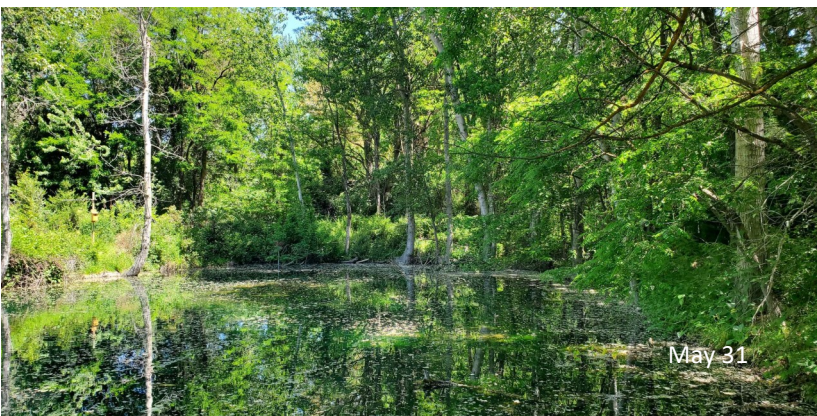
January 9



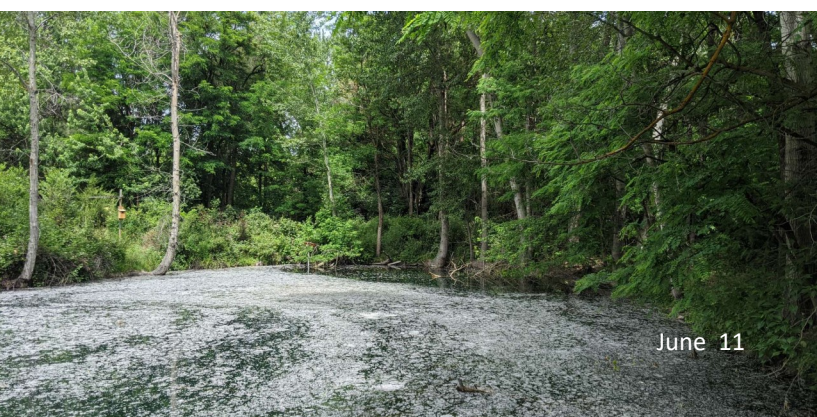
January 12



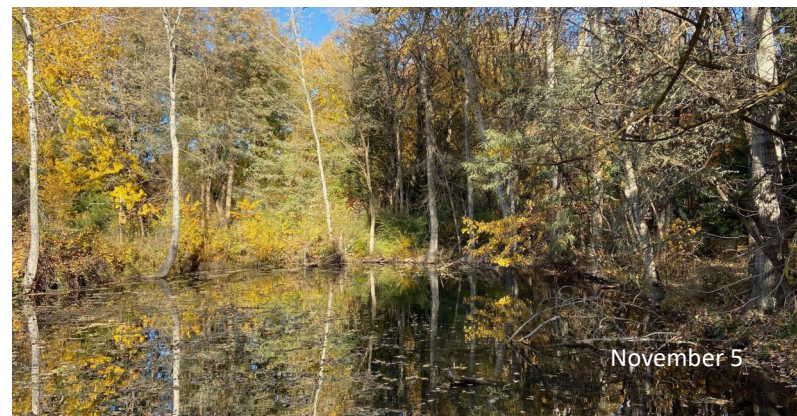
April 9



May 31



June 11



November 5



September 12 smoke

This year has been filled with change at the MK Nature Center. In many ways, this is true of every year. When in a business that is dependent upon and revolved around nature, change is the only constant.

But just like all of you, the change this year was perhaps more dramatic than just the seasonal changes we see from day to day, year to year.

COVID-19 and the IDFG headquarters construction have created challenges for us, but have also provided us with the opportunity to think about what we have, what we need, and how we work!

These changes will come and go. New changes will arrive, come, and go. The Chronolog camera site on the Sturgeon Pond bridge has helped us capture the seasonal changes we see each day at the nature center. The cameral site allows visitors to take a photo with their cell phones using a mounted camera bracket and upload their photo to our Chronolog site.

Thank you to those of you who have uploaded photos throughout the year. If you have not, consider taking a trip down to MKNC to see the changes yourself!

[Check out the entire time-lapse of the sturgeon pond.](#)



# The Bird Seed Sale that Almost Didn't Happen

Sue Dudley, Gift Shop Manager and Volunteer Coordinator, MKNC

This year's sale went the way of 2020. We overcame COVID-19, construction in the parking lot, and our seed being accidentally shipped to Portland just days before the sale!

Once the dust settled and our fundraiser ended, it turned out to be another successful year, and it all because of our loyal customers and supporters. Thank you to all who came to support us. Thanks to our wonderful volunteers who helped with the sale!



Above: Unmasked for a quick photo, Cindy Clark, Michele Andrews, Jan Egge, Benita Putzier, and Claire Veseth.

Below: Bonnie Urresti, Jon Mathews, Nadine Chaffee, and Debbie Wiggins. Not pictured: Carolyn King, Elizabeth Grosse, Crikky Simon, Gail Nottingham, Cindy Marlow. Photos by MKNC.





## Short-tailed Weasel

Sara Focht, Wildlife Educator, MKNC



“Ermine,” photo by Bryan Olsen, Flickr (CC-BY-NC 2.0)

The short-tailed weasel or ermine (*Mustela erminea*) is Idaho’s smallest member of the weasel (mustelid) family. Small-yes, ranging from 7-13 inches long, but not wimpy! All members of the mustelid family are ferocious hunters (river otter, skunk, wolverine, marten, mink, long-tailed weasel, American fisher, badger).

Both the long and short-tailed weasels lose their brown coat in the winter and turn almost completely white. Another winter adaptation for survival includes the ability to tunnel through snow and hunt small rodents in the subnivean zone (right where snow and ground meet). When there is not snow covering the ground, the short-tailed weasel will successfully hunt and kill larger prey such as squirrels, rabbits, frogs, birds and eggs. According to the [Digital Atlas of Idaho](#), a short-tailed weasel killing a snowshoe hare is comparable to a poodle killing a yearling cow!

Though we don’t see short-tailed weasels at the MK Nature Center, or in the area of the Snake River Plain, I have had three observations of the short-tailed weasel, all of which were exhilarating. My first encounter was in a restroom in a remote forest in Wyoming. A trapped short-tailed weasel found himself inside this bathroom with me and was scrambling all around the toilet, up my leg and back down again, trying to escape...which I helped him do. My second encounter was just outside this remote forest toilet (but on a different day) where a short-tailed



weasel was attacking and killing a ground squirrel while being trampled by a snowshoe hare (I could not make this stuff up). My final encounter was hiking in the winter along a forest road. The weasel undulated in front of me, pure white except for a black tail...and dove into snow hole. I examined the hole, smaller than a ping-pong ball and just noticed one bright red drop of blood at the snow’s surface.

I hope you have a chance to see one of these winter predators in action!

“Stoat” photo by Soumyajit Nandy on Flickr (CC-BY-NC 2.0)





# A Blast from the Past

Local photographer, Nature Center Supporter ,and Idaho Master Naturalist, Patrick Stoll donated his collection of 35 mm slides and scanned digital copies he took 30 years ago with the Nature Center was first opened. Thank you, Pat! Shown here are some of my favorites from his donated collection. Pat has a stunning array of photos and blogposts [at his website.](#)

Photos clockwise starting in upper left: Nature Center grounds almost unrecognizable with the plants so young. A photo through the alpine lake window looking up at the waterfall. The alpine Lake window with full view of the old snag. The wetland bridge with cattails and lily pads. The front entrance stone signs. Photos by Patrick Stoll.





# Tis the Season for Feeding Birds!

Vicky Runnoe, Conservation Education Supervisor, IDFG

Our annual bird seed sale has come and gone. Bird feeders around our community are well-stocked against winter's cold, meaning that their avian visitors will be well-fed. If you purchased seed for your feeders, you are among over 50 million North Americans who feed the birds. It is one of the largest wildlife-related past times enjoyed by a wide diversity of people. In this pandemic year, bird feeding has become even more popular. Home-bound people have discovered the birds in their yards and responded by taking up bird feeding and bird watching as a way to connect with the outdoors.

Unlike other animals such as deer, offering food does not make birds dependent upon your feeders. Research indicates that birds simply incorporate a feeding station into their daily rounds as they search for food. An empty feeder is bypassed and birds seek food elsewhere. Of all the seed offered, black-oil sunflower appeals to the greatest diversity of birds. Even ground feeders such as dark-eyed junco and California quail enjoy sunflower seeds. Offering a mixed seed, the majority of which is millet, attracts doves, white-crowned sparrows, song sparrows, and spotted towhees along with juncos and quail.



While house finches love sunflower seed, their smaller cousins the American goldfinch, lesser goldfinch, and pine siskin prefer Nyger thistle. These tiny seeds require a special feeder, but can attract a lot of birds in a hurry. Other common feeder birds in our area include red-breasted nuthatch, house sparrow, downy woodpecker (at suet feeders), and the black-capped chickadee, a perennial feeder favorite. If you are lucky, you might get a visit by a Cooper's hawk intent on finding dinner at your feeding station. If this happens try not to begrudge the hawk its meal. After all, everyone needs to eat.

As winter settles in, fill your feeders, grab your binoculars and spend some time getting to know your feathered neighbors. You, like millions of others, may soon find yourself captivated by the birds.

Top: Photo: Black-capped Chickadee with seed by Austin Reich.  
Middle: Downy Woodpecker.  
Bottom: Mourning doves feeding on the ground by IDFG.





# VOLUNTEERS

Michele Andrew	Gail Nottingham
Ron Andrew	Benita Putzier
Brent Davy	Howard Sheppa
Kevin Drews	Crikky Simon
Cindy Clark	Pat Stoll
Nadine Chaffee	Bonnie Urresti
Jan Egge	Claire Veseth
Elizabeth Grosse	Roger Wallace
Carolyn King	Debbie Wiggins
Jon Mathews	Kevin Wilson
Cindy Marlow	

**October**  
**November**  
**December**

## DONORS

Jane Bates  
Bill Horton  
Sally Hughes  
Sharon and Russ Kiefer  
Hilda Packard  
Patty Rowan  
Cathryn Stangl & Charles Johnson  
Rangens  
Wild Birds Unlimited

Donors listed here do not include donors who gave to [Friends of MK Nature Center](#) (the Nature Center's 501c3 nonprofit organization).



Even well thought out and planned projects have unintended consequences. After the Grey Beards (volunteer group pictured left) finished the life-size bald eagle nest, well-intentioned parents and grandparents were trampling the nearby grasses and shrubs to better photograph their young eaglets in the nest. The Grey Beards swooped in like eagles and built a photo taking platform, to better accommodate visitors and help protect the habitat.

The Grey Beards from left to right: Brent Davy, Roger Wallace, Howard Sheppa, Kevin Wilson, and Kevin Drews. Photo by Sue Dudley.



*Wishing you  
a Bright  
New Year!*

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Northern Flicker. Photo by Austin Reich.